

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6350
INFO AMEMBASSY BERLIN
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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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USMISSION USBERLIN
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, GW, GE
SUBJECT: GERMAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS HOLD NATIONAL
CONVENTION

BEGIN SUMMARY: IN TERMS OF STRENGTHENING CDU CHAIR-
MAN KOHL'S POSITION, THE 25TH CDU NATIONAL CONVENTION,
MARCH 7-9, WAS A SUCCESS. NOT ONLY DID HE RECEIVE
AN OVERWHELMING ENDORSEMENT IN TERMS OF RE-ELECTION
(I.E., 95 PERCENT POSITIVE VOTES), BUT HIS CHOICE FOR
SECRETARY-GENERAL, DR. HEINRICH GEISSLER, ALSO RECEIVED
AN IMPRESSIVE ELECTION VICTORY. POTENTIAL RIVALS FOR
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THE PARTY CHAIRMANSHIP, SUCH AS BIEDENKOPF AND DREGGER,
DID WELL, BUT NOT WELL ENOUGH TO REPRESENT A THREAT TO
KOHL AT THIS TIME.

THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS SCRUPULOUSLY AVOIDED DISCUSSING
CURRENT POLITICAL ISSUES, SUCH AS THE SOCIAL SECURITY
SYSTEM'S FINANCIAL CRISIS. A WHOLE DAY WAS DEVOTED

TO AN INTERESTING, ALBEIT ACADEMIC DISCUSSION OF INNER-GERMAN RELATIONS. THE RESOLUTION APPROVED WAS A CAREFULLY WORKED OUT DOCUMENT WHICH REPRESENTS AN ATTEMPT TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE CDU'S POLICY VIS-A-VIS THE GDR NEED NOT BE ANATHEMA TO THE FDP. ALTHOUGH NO RADICAL CHANGE IN CDU POLICY EMERGED, THE QUESTION REMAINS WHETHER HELMUT KOHL, SOLIDLY ENTRENCHED IN THE PARTY, WILL USE HIS STRENGTHENED POSITION TO TAKE A MORE FORCEFUL STAND AS OPPOSITION LEADER. HOWEVER, EVEN IF HE DOES NOT, AS MANY CDU MEMBERS FEAR, THE DUESSELDORF CONVENTION PROVED THAT THERE IS NO ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE RHEINLAND-PFAELZER AT THIS TIME. CSU CHAIRMAN STRAUSS OPTED TO VISIT TOGO RATHER THAN TO ATTEND THE PARTEITAG. END SUMMARY.

1. BY ALMOST ANY MEASURE, THE 25TH BUNDESPARTEITAG OF THE CDU, WHICH WAS HELD IN DUESSELDORF THIS WEEK, WAS A DULL AFFAIR. KOHL FACED NO CHALLENGE FOR RE-ELECTION, AND HE HAD ALREADY ARRANGED FOR AN EXPANSION IN THE NUMBER OF DEPUTY PARTY LEADERS, SO THAT NONE OF THE CANDIDATES COULD LOSE. HIS CHOICE FOR SECRETARY-GENERAL RECEIVED 746 OUT OF A POSSIBLE 812 VOTES, AND THE ELECTION OF THE TWENTY-MEMBER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPRESENTED A COMPROMISE AMONG THE VARIOUS GEOGRAPHIC FACTIONS, INTEREST GROUPS, AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHIES EXISTING WITHIN THE PARTY.

2. KOHL'S OVERWHELMING RE-ELECTION (767 OUT OF 810 VOTES) WAS FAR BETTER THAN HE OR HIS ADVISORS HAD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EXPECTED. RECENT CRITICISM OF KOHL'S LEADERSHIP FROM WITHIN THE CDU/CSU BUNDESTAG FRAKTION LED KOHL SUPPORTERS TO FEAR THAT THERE WOULD BE A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF NEGATIVE VOTES CAST AGAINST HIM. THEIR FEARS WERE UNFOUNDED, AND KOHL RECEIVED MORE VOTES THAN HE HAD IN 1975.

3. KOHL'S OPENING SPEECH WAS LACKLUSTER, AND HE STUCK TO GENERALITIES. HE DID HOLD OUT THE OFFER TO THE FDP FOR A COALITION AND REJECTED A GRAND COALITION WITH THE SPD. BIEDENKOPF'S SPEECH WAS MORE INTELLECTUAL AND WAS WELL RECEIVED. THE FORMER SECRETARY-GENERAL, WHO IS BEGINNING A NEW POLITICAL CAREER IN NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA, DISCUSSED THE RECENT CONSTITUTIONAL COURT DECISION AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT'S USE OF OFFICIAL FUNDS FOR CAMPAIGN PROPAGANDA, AND THE NEED TO RESTORE CONFIDENCE OF THE ORDINARY GERMAN CITIZENS IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS.

4. MOST OF THE DRAMA WAS TAKEN OUT OF THE ELECTION FOR THE POSITIONS OF DEPUTY PARTY CHAIRMEN AFTER LOWER SAXONY MINISTER-PRESIDENT DR. ERNST ALBRECHT AND PARTY THEORETICIAN RICHARD VON WEIZSAECKER REMOVED THEMSELVES FROM THE CONTEST. THAT LEFT EXACTLY THE SAME NUMBER OF

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CANDIDATES AS THERE WERE POSITIONS. RHEINLAND-PFALZ CULTURAL MINISTER, DR. HANNA-RENAE LAURIEN, RECEIVED THE MOST VOTES (731), FOLLOWED BY DR. GERHARD STOLTENBERG (682), AND PROFESSOR KURT BIEDENKOPF (602). THEN CAME HANS KATZER (598), DR. ALFRED DREGGER (570), AND DR. HANS FILBINGER (514). NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA CDU LEADER HEINRICH KOEPLER RECEIVED THE LEAST NUMBER OF VOTES (512) AND UNDOUBTEDLY CAN FEEL BIEDENKOPF

BREATHING DOWN HIS NECK FOR THE TOP POSITION IN NRW.

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5. THE RELATIVELY WEAK PERFORMANCE BY AVOWED CONSERVATIVES, DREGGER AND FILBINGER, IS AN INDICATION THAT THE CDU NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP IS MORE LIBERAL THAN THE MAJORITY OF BUNDESTAG FRAKTION MEMBERS. LEISLER KIEP, ONE OF THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL POLITICIANS IN THE PARTY, ONCE AGAIN WAS ELECTED PARTY TREASURER, ALTHOUGH 94 DELEGATES VOTED AGAINST HIM.

6. AS FAR AS THE ELECTIONS FOR PARTY OFFICES WERE CONCERNED, KOHL HAS EVERY REASON TO BE HAPPY. THE SIZE OF HIS ELECTION IS A DEMONSTRATION OF WIDESPREAD SUPPORT IN THE PARTY. IN ADDITION, THE GOOD BUT NOT OUTSTANDING SHOWING BY THE STRONGEST POTENTIAL CHALLENGER, KURT BIEDENKOPF, IS AN INDICATION THAT THE PARTY DOES NOT SEE AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE FORMER RHEINLAND-PFALZ MINISTER-PRESIDENT. ALBRECHT OR VON WEIZSAECKER, BOTH POLITICIANS WHO ARE CLOSER TO KOHL'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY THAN DREGGER OR FILBINGER, PROBABLY COULD HAVE BEEN ELECTED TO A DEPUTY CHAIRMANSHIP. HOWEVER, THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN AT KOEPLER'S EXPENSE AND WOULD HAVE CREATED SOME INTERNAL STRAINS. THERE ARE ALREADY SOME COMPLAINTS THAT A RHEINLAND-PFALZ MAFIA IS TAKING OVER THE PARTY.

7. AMONG THE ADDITIONAL 20 MEMBERS OF THE PARTY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, RHEINLAND-PFALZ MINISTER-PRESIDENT BERNHARD VOGEL RECEIVED THE MOST VOTES (775), FOLLOWED BY VON WEIZSAECKER (740), WHOSE WAHLKREIS IS ALSO IN RHEINLAND-PFALZ. THERE WAS SOME RUMBLING ABOUT THE COMPOSITION OF THE PARTY LEADERSHIP BY VARIOUS FACTIONS. SOME OF THE YOUNGER DELEGATES WERE UPSET THAT DR. GERD LANGGUTH WAS NOT RE-ELECTED TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE. IT WAS ALSO POINTED OUT BY A PROMINENT PROTESTANT CDU POLITICIAN THAT OF THE TOP NINE POSITIONS IN THE PARTY, EIGHT ARE CATHOLICS. ALTHOUGH THE RELIGIOUS SQUABBLING THAT WAS SO PREVALENT WITHIN THE CDU IN THE POSTWAR

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PERIOD HAS DIMINISHED CONSIDERABLY, IT REMAINS STILL A SENSITIVE NERVE JUST BELOW THE SURFACE.

8. THE WHOLE SECOND DAY OF THE PARTY CONVENTION WAS

DEVOTED TO THE GDR AND INNER-GERMAN RELATIONS. THREE PROMINENT ACADEMICIANS DELIVERED LENGTHY LECTURES, FOLLOWED BY A PODIUM DISCUSSION AND SPEECHES FROM THE FLOOR. THE RESOLUTION WHICH WAS PASSED BY THE CONVENTION WAS THE PRODUCT OF A CAREFULLY WORKED OUT COMPROMISE INTENDED TO SHOW A BIT MORE FLEXIBILITY THAN IN THE PAST. THAT SAID, NOTHING ACTUALLY NEW EMERGED. STATEMENTS MADE BY SWISS PROFESSOR KURT GASTEYGER, CALLING FOR SOME UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEMS OF THE GDR, WERE CONSIDERED BY MANY DELEGATES TO BE FAR TOO CHARITABLE. (A MORE COMPLETE REPORT ON THE INNER-GERMAN PORTION OF THE CONVENTION WILL BE THE SUBJECT OF A SEPARATE REPORT.)

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9. ONE OF THE MORE REMARKABLE THINGS ABOUT THE CONVENTION WAS THAT THE OPPOSITION DID NOT USE THE OCCASION TO ATTACK THE GOVERNMENT FOR A WHOLE SERIES OF EMBARRASSING MISTAKES WHICH HAVE PLAGUED THE SPD/FDP COALITION. MOST DELEGATES LEFT THE CONVENTION FEELING THAT, ALL IN ALL, THE DUESSELDORF MEETING HAD BEEN LESS THAN STIMULATING.

10. THE QUESTION REMAINS AS TO WHAT KOHL WILL DO NOW.
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HE IS IN A STRONGER POSITION WITHIN THE PARTY THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE HE BECAME CHAIRMAN. CLEARLY, HE HAS A MANDATE FROM THE PARTY, AND WITH A NEW SECRETARY-GENERAL WHO IS A TRUSTED CONFIDANT HE SHOULD BE IN A POSITION TO IMPOSE HIS POLICIES ON THE FRAKTION. HOWEVER, EVEN HIS SUPPORTERS ARE NOT CONVINCED THAT HE WILL SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY. THE EVIDENCE, AT LEAST UP UNTIL NOW, WOULD SEEM TO INDICATE THAT HE WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK ACCOMMODATION RATHER THAN CONFRONTATION IN THE FRAKTION. THIS WOULD MEAN THAT THE DISAGREEMENT OVER THE MOST EFFECTIVE STRATEGY--SHOULD THE CDU SEEK ACCOMMODATION WITH THE FDP IN THE HOPE OF BRINGING THE LIBERALS AROUND BEFORE 1980, OR SHOULD THE PARTY SEEK A CLEAR-CUT CONFRONTATION IN THE HOPE OF ACHIEVING AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN 1980--WILL CONTINUE DESPITE KOHL'S PREFERENCE FOR THE FORMER.
STOESSEL

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